

THEMATIC SERIES

# UnSettlement: Urban displacement in the 21st century

This thematic series explores the scale, nature and dynamics of internal displacement in towns and cities across the world



## CITY OF FLIGHT

New and secondary displacements in Mogadishu, Somalia

NOVEMBER 2018

## KEY MESSAGES

- | Between 2017 and mid-2018, 32 per cent of new displacements recorded in Somalia were to, or within, the capital city of Mogadishu. Urban displacement is contributing to the fact that Mogadishu now has the second highest urban population density in the world.
- | The year of 2017 was Somalia's second most violent year in nearly a decade. Drought, competition for natural resources and poor living conditions fuel fighting in rural areas and push people towards Mogadishu.
- | Within Mogadishu, over 300,000 new displacements have been recorded since the beginning of 2017.
- | Somalia's conflict was played out in Mogadishu for many years, making the city both a battlefield that has triggered urban displacement and a sanctuary for hundreds of thousands of people fleeing insecurity and lack of opportunity in rural areas. For many internally displaced people (IDPs), however, the arrival in Mogadishu does not mark an end to their plight.
- | Urban IDPs face specific vulnerabilities, including poor water and sanitation conditions, food insecurity, a lack of personal documentation and poor shelter and tenure security. Land and property disputes are at the heart of urban conflict. Clan power dynamics lie behind IDPs' lack of tenure security and the growing number of forced evictions.
- | Forced evictions have been taking place since the onset of Somalia's conflict in the early 1990s, but the scale of the problem is now unprecedented. In Mogadishu, 99 per cent of the evictees are IDPs.
- | The informal nature of the housing sector in Somalia is a crosscutting challenge that puts a burden on both cities and IDPs. In the absence of clear laws to regulate transactions, the number of illegal evictions, the majority of them affecting IDPs, is likely to rise. This neglected issue requires urgent attention if displacement is to be reduced and durable solutions facilitated for hundreds of thousands of IDPs.

## INTRODUCTION

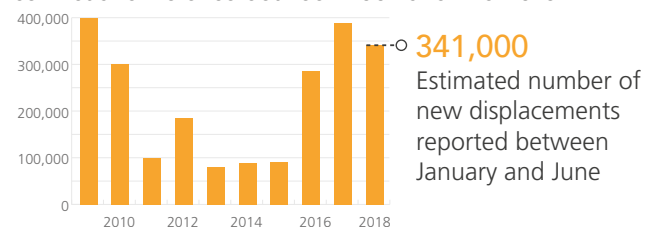
Somalia experienced a sharp increase in new displacements associated with both conflict and disasters in 2017 and the first half of 2018. Many of those displaced have moved from rural areas to the country's main cities in search of shelter, protection and humanitarian assistance. Forced evictions have triggered displacement within urban areas, and data shows that the vast majority of those evicted had already been displaced before. Displacement is clearly shaping Somalia's urban landscape and contributing to its urbanisation rate, which is one of the highest in the world.

Weak urban systems, however, are unable to cope with the demands of the ever-growing population and the arrival and settlement of internally displaced people (IDPs).<sup>1</sup> Mogadishu has been their main destination by far. It is home to about 600,000 IDPs, most of whom live in informal settlements, and the city has the second highest urban population density in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Slow and sudden-onset natural hazards have increased competition for resources in rural areas, including already scarce agricultural land and pasture for livestock. This in turn has aggravated clan conflicts, forcing people to flee to Mogadishu in search of safety and better livelihood opportunities.<sup>3</sup> Ongoing Al Shabaab offensives and clashes with the Somali army also continue to force people to flee. This complex interplay of displacement drivers, triggers and impacts has spiralled into a general lack of opportunity that has slowed down peacebuilding and long-term development, creating a complex and protracted humanitarian crisis with no solution in sight.

For many IDPs, arrival in Mogadishu does not mark an end to their plight. On the contrary, their inability to access basic services, particularly housing, has forced them into secondary displacement. Forced evictions accounted for 166,000 new displacements nationwide in 2017, or 43 per cent of the all new displacements associated with conflict and violence during the year.<sup>4</sup> The situation deteriorated significantly in the first half of 2018, when they accounted for 191,000 new displacements, or 56 per cent of all new displacements associated with conflict and violence.<sup>5</sup> Forced evictions have been taking place since the onset of Somalia's conflict in the early 1990s, but the scale of the problem is now unprecedented. The overall number of new displacements recorded in 2018 will likely be the highest in a decade (see figure 1).

FIGURE 1: Total number of new displacements triggered by conflict and violence between 2009 and mid-2018



Source: IDMC, PRMN

This is the second case study in our thematic series on urban displacement in the 21st century.<sup>6</sup> It discusses the latest developments in terms of rural to urban displacement in Somalia, and the ongoing situation in the capital. By examining the drivers and patterns of urban displacement, it aims to contribute to broader discussions on the nature of the phenomenon, increase knowledge and inform programming and policymaking to address and reduce it.

# RECENT DISPLACEMENT PATTERNS AND TRENDS

## I PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

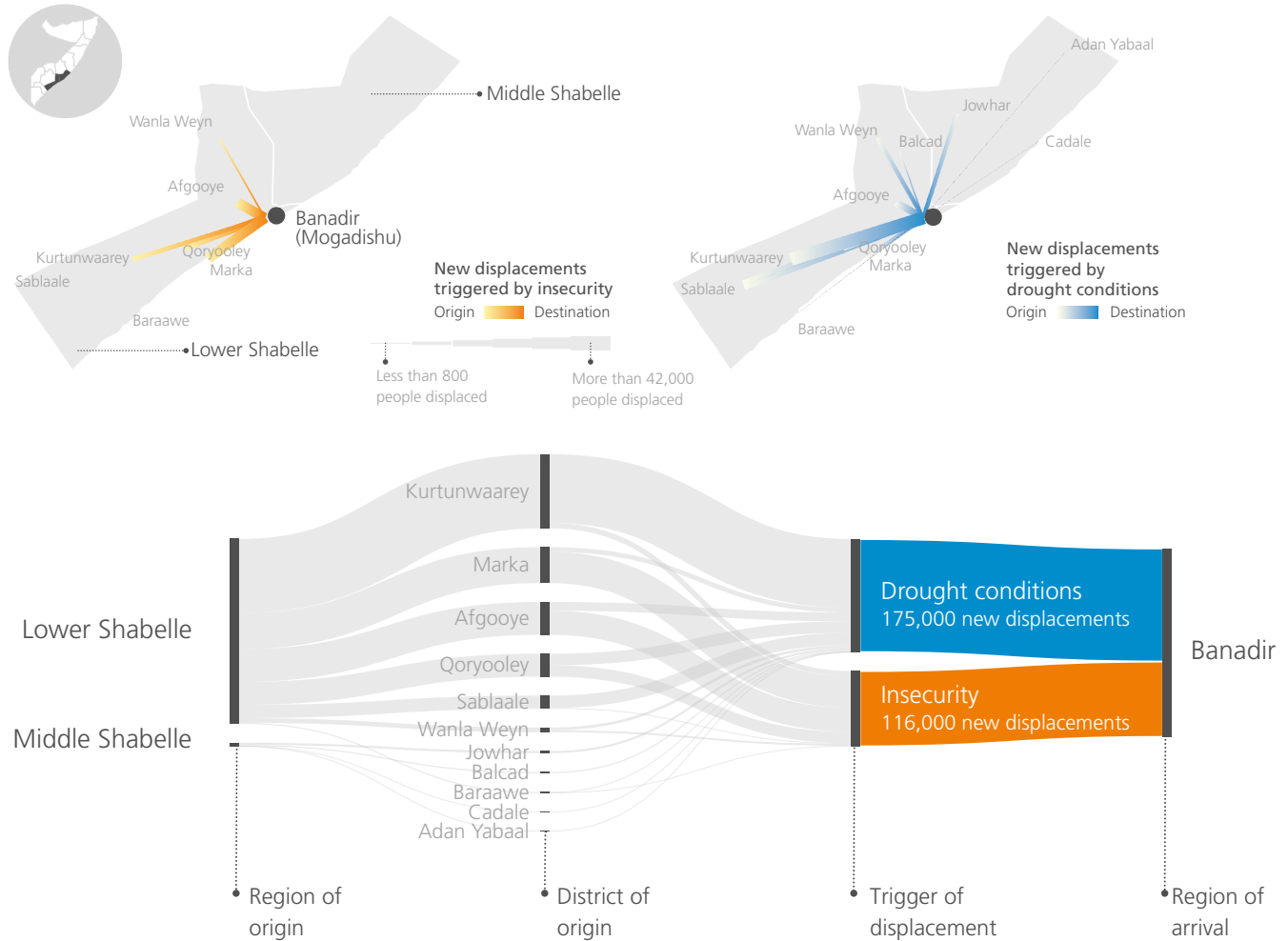
Somalia has and will continue to experience prolonged droughts and heavy flooding, and these are likely to become more frequent and intense with the impacts of climate change. Such events undermine livelihoods and coping mechanisms, and aggravate conflict over scarce resources. The ultimate outcome is the displacement of mostly rural populations to urban areas in search of safety, alternative livelihoods and humanitarian assistance. To make matters worse, Al Shabaab attacks and Somali army offensives against its militias in the south-east of the country also force people to flee toward Mogadishu.<sup>7</sup>

Drought in Somalia has been severe in recent years as a result of the El Niño weather phenomenon, and four poor rainy seasons in 2016 and 2017 have had extensive impacts on people living in rural areas, their livestock and food security.<sup>8</sup> Cereal harvests were 70 per cent lower than the longer-term average in 2016, and the reduction in grazing land led to total

livestock loss in some areas, triggering the impoverishment and displacement of farmers, agropastoralists and pastoralists.<sup>9</sup> The trend continued in 2017, with only erratic and below average rainfall.<sup>10</sup> As of the end of the year 6.2 million people, half of the country's population, needed humanitarian assistance, of whom 3.2 million faced severe food insecurity. Acute malnutrition increased by 50 per cent compared with 2016.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, 2017 was also Somalia's second most violent year since 2008, and the number of fatalities related to conflict was the highest in a decade. Al Shabaab attacks and clashes with the Somali armed forces peaked, as did US and UK airstrikes against the group, which led to civilian fatalities.<sup>12</sup> Peacekeeping forces from the AU mission in Somalia (AMISOM) also withdrew from key locations, which strengthened Al Shabaab's position in several areas of the south-east.<sup>13</sup> 2018 is on course to record similar levels of violence.<sup>14</sup> The election of Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed as Somalia's president in February 2017 is also thought to have contributed to the violence. He listed defeating Al Shabaab as his main priority, which is believed to have led the group to use the vacuum left by AMISOM to try to strengthen its grip on some areas.<sup>15</sup>

FIGURE 2: New displacements from Middle and Lower Shabelle to Banadir in 2017 and first half of 2018

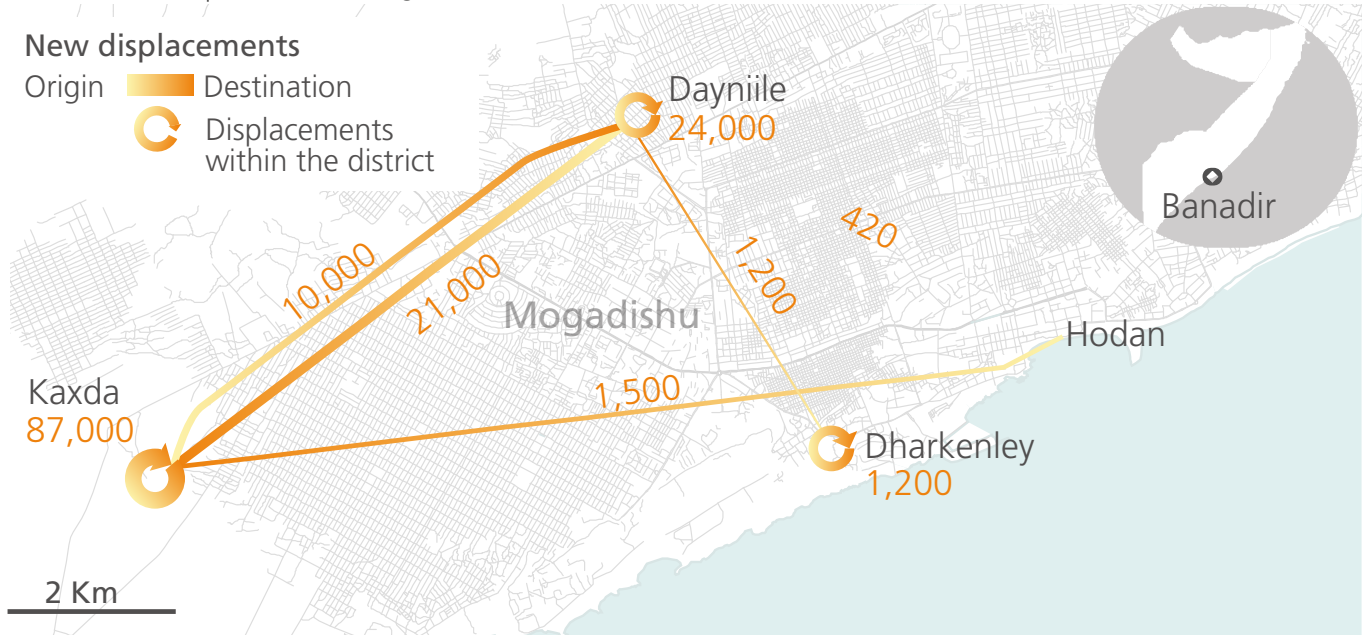


Source: PRMN. Small displacement flows are not displayed on the above graphics.

\*The information shown on the following maps and charts has been compiled from diverse sources and may not be accurately displayed. The information represented is used for illustrative purposes.



FIGURE 3: New displacements in Mogadishu in 2017



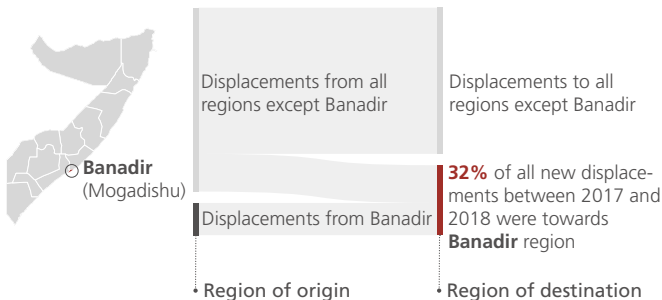
Source: PRMN. The district names and figures are shown only when the new displacements value exceeds 400.

As a result of these developments, more than 136,000 people moved to Mogadishu from Lower and Middle Shabelle because of drought and lack of livelihoods in 2017, and another 80,000 mostly from Lower Shabelle to escape insecurity related to Al Shabaab’s activities and offensives against its militias.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, nearly 150,000 of the new displacements recorded in 2017 were identified as taking place within Mogadishu, half of them within Kaxda district.<sup>17</sup> Such movements toward and within the capital account for about 35 per cent of all displacements in Somalia, a dynamic not seen in any other country (see figures 2 and 3).

The first half of 2018 was no different, with 103,000 displacements from rural areas to Mogadishu and 158,000 within the city recorded. These movements together accounted for about a third of all displacements. It should also be noted that a large proportion of the IDPs who do not make it to Mogadishu go to other urban centres. Very few stay in rural areas (see figure 4).<sup>18</sup> As observed in previous years, many new IDPs moved to urban and peri-urban areas, where they joined those already living in protracted displacement. Others established new settlements.<sup>19</sup>

FIGURE 4: Rural-urban and urban-urban displacement flows in Somalia in 2017 and first half of 2018



Source: PRMN, UN-HABITAT, NRC, Protection Cluster

As well as the push factors linked to rural poverty aggravated by drought and conflict, the prospect of humanitarian assistance and a relatively safe environment in Mogadishu also serve as pull factors for displacement. Humanitarian access is very restricted across Somalia, particularly in the south-east and disputed northern areas, and violence against humanitarians and other access challenges increased in 2017 as political and conflict dynamics evolved. This drove even more people toward the stronger humanitarian presence in the capital, adding to the already very significant burden on its urban services.<sup>20</sup>

## I URBAN VULNERABILITIES AND NEEDS

The unprecedented wave of displacement in 2017 also put pressure on the delivery of humanitarian assistance. It is estimated that 1.1 million IDPs living in protracted displacement received significantly less assistance than in previous years, despite their continuing and growing vulnerabilities.<sup>21</sup> New arrivals also struggled to obtain adequate assistance. Many were only given emergency housing materials which are unable to withstand harsh weather conditions.<sup>22</sup>

After years of drought, heavy rains in April 2018 triggered further displacement. Almost half of the 274,000 displacements recorded took place in the city of Belet Weyne in the central region of Hiraan, which is regularly affected by severe flooding of the Shebelle river. Floods in Mogadishu destroyed almost all of the shelters and latrines in the K12 displacement settlement.<sup>23</sup> Its residents were forced into secondary displacement.

The lack of adequate housing in Mogadishu has made shelter one of the most pressing needs for newly arrived IDPs. According to a 2016 survey, landlords are often unwilling to rent to poor people or members of clans other than their own, making the situation even more acute. Nor would the majority

of IDPs interviewed accept a rental agreement with a landlord from a different clan. Landlords also tend to avoid formal rental agreements, which makes tenants vulnerable to eviction.<sup>24</sup> Urbanisation and overcrowding have also inflated property prices.<sup>25</sup> Land claims and grabs are ongoing, and humanitarian and development organisations are reluctant to invest into building adequate and affordable housing given the constant risk of IDPs being evicted and their shelters destroyed.<sup>26</sup>

The prospect of humanitarian assistance may have drawn people to Mogadishu, but many urban IDPs still have specific vulnerabilities. Very high levels of food insecurity, malnutrition, morbidity and mortality have been recorded, and these increased in 2017. Acute malnutrition levels surpassed the emergency threshold of 15 per cent.<sup>27</sup> IDPs living in Mogadishu were classified as severely food insecure in the first half of 2017, which was mostly related to the arrival of many new IDPs from rural Bakool and Bay regions who were already severely food insecure when they arrived. The arrival of new IDPs has also pushed up food prices and increased competition for wage labour.<sup>28</sup> IDPs in Mogadishu remained severely food insecure in 2018 despite improved harvests in large areas of the country.<sup>29</sup>

Overcrowding in urban displacement settlements has heightened the risk of gender-based violence (GBV), and poor sanitation and limited access to safe water and healthcare have led to outbreaks of disease. Sharp increases in acute watery diarrhoea, cholera and measles were observed in 2017.<sup>30</sup> IDPs' health situation is one of the worst of all populations in Mogadishu, and they report difficulties in accessing health services.<sup>31</sup> More than 80 per cent of childbirths among IDPs take place at home, and 40 per cent of all diarrhoea cases in the Banadir region, which includes Mogadishu, were recorded on the outskirts of the city where IDPs live.<sup>32</sup>

All of these issues raise serious questions about the extent to which cities, and Mogadishu in particular, represent a sanctuary of protection, safety and security for IDPs.

## I EVICTIONS AND SECONDARY DISPLACEMENT

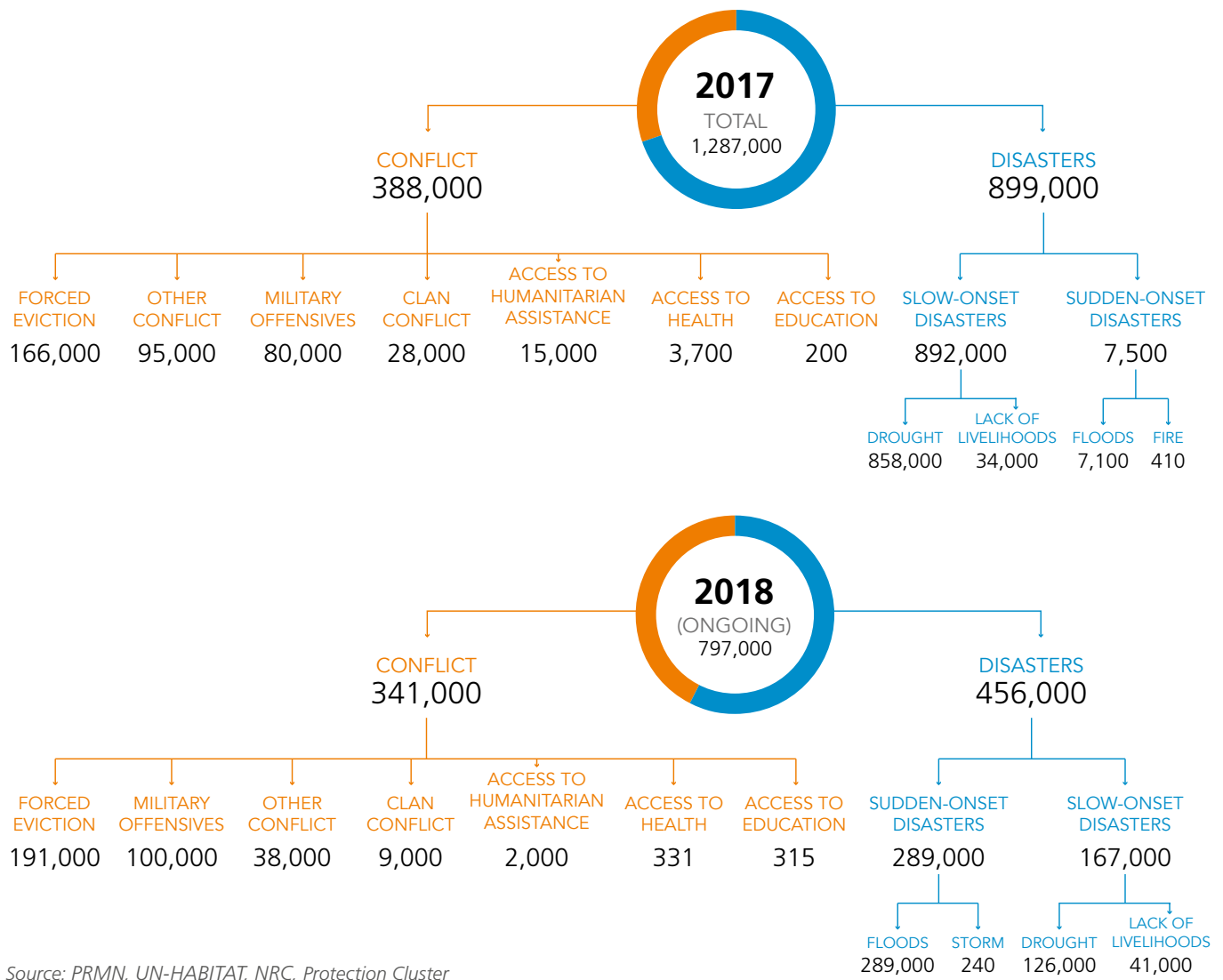
IDPs' precarious living conditions in Mogadishu mean they are at constant risk of secondary displacement. The most prevalent reason is forced evictions, which are occurring in record numbers, but other triggers such as natural hazards and lack of livelihoods are also common. There was a spike in the number of evictions in 2017 and the first half of 2018, and most involved IDPs who had settled informally on the outskirts of the city.<sup>33</sup> Eviction not only means the loss of a home or shelter. It often also involves the loss of livelihood assets and food stocks, family separation and trauma. Some people are also subjected to physical violence during the eviction process.<sup>34</sup> Women and children are disproportionately affected by associated protection incidents.<sup>35</sup>

The increasing number of evictions is linked to rising land and property values. Once abandoned areas where IDPs had made their home have become some of the most desirable real estate and commercial locations.<sup>36</sup> The return of relative security and stability in recent years has attracted developers to central districts, which then had to be emptied of IDPs who had occupied property informally. Many were pushed out to peripheral districts such as Kaxda and Daynile, where informal settlements started to grow in 2012 after Al Shabaab largely withdrew from the areas. Most of the IDPs who arrived in Mogadishu in 2017 also made for the same districts. As of the end of 2017 more than 500 unplanned informal settlements were thought to exist in Kaxda and Daynile.<sup>37</sup>



Photo credit: NRC/Christian Jepsen, January 2012

FIGURE 5: New displacements in 2017 and first half of 2018, disaggregated by trigger



Source: PRMN, UN-HABITAT, NRC, Protection Cluster

Residents tend to build their shelters on private land for which they pay rent, but few if any have their tenure documented. Disagreements over rent between IDPs and “gatekeepers”, the de facto managers of informal settlements, have led to daily small-scale evictions, and this constant risk prevents IDPs from establishing the stability they need to pursue durable solutions to their displacement.<sup>38</sup> Evictees tend to move locally to other already overcrowded settlements, putting additional pressure on their services and facilities and aggravating the humanitarian situation on the outskirts of the city.<sup>39</sup>

Nearly 148,000 people were evicted in Mogadishu in 2017. The worst single event occurred at the end of December, when 35,000 people were forcibly evicted without notice from Kaxda district as a result of a protracted dispute between powerful landlords. Some evictees who moved within Kaxda appear to have been forced to flee again by floods in May 2018. At least 4,000 people had their new shelters and latrines destroyed and they ended up living in open fields with dire humanitarian needs.<sup>40</sup>

Evictions have also had a major impact on the provision of services in affected areas. During the demolitions associated with the December 2017 mass eviction, 13 schools, a GBV centre, a feeding centre, three community centres, more than 350 small businesses and many latrines and water points were destroyed. This also affected neighbouring IDPs and host communities who used the facilities to access healthcare, education and other services.<sup>41</sup>

The cycle of displacement in Mogadishu illustrates how its causes, triggers and impacts are interconnected. Drought, violence and lack of livelihoods force people to move to the city, but their tenure and shelter conditions are poor, putting them at risk of eviction or further displacement as a result of natural hazards. In search of new shelter, some end up in even more unstable settlements and at higher risk of tertiary displacement. This puts an immense burden on urban systems and services as well as other populations in the capital, and humanitarians have to constantly readapt their aid provision to the changing circumstances.



## HOUSING CHALLENGES AND CLAN DIVIDES

Somalia's conflict was played out in Mogadishu for many years, making the city both a battlefield that has triggered urban displacement and a sanctuary for hundreds of thousands of IDPs fleeing insecurity and lack of opportunity in rural areas. Its highly volatile and changing dynamics have put its political, economic and cultural landscape in a state of constant flux. Old and new power structures have been consolidated over time and have established geographical divisions within the city.

Clan-based allegiances have played a significant role in defining conflict and displacement dynamics in Mogadishu. By the late 1980s, urban population growth and migration driven by increasing fertility rates and the concentration of wealth and public services had created a city in which different clans lived side by side. Since the ousting of Siad Barre as president sparked conflict in 1991, however, competition between warring factions for the control of land, water, livestock trade and humanitarian and development aid increased.<sup>42</sup> The conflict substantially changed Mogadishu's demography with the exodus en masse of vulnerable minority clans such as the Reer Hamar and other non-Hawiye groups. Members of Hawiye clans began to dominate the city and migrate to it.<sup>43</sup>

The upshot was a dichotomy between the two most powerful rival Hawiye clans, the Abgaal and Habar Gedir, which led to urban conflict, heavy fighting, infrastructure destruction and the establishment of a "green line" between the north and south of the city separating their territories.<sup>44</sup> These dynamics are highly relevant to civilians, who look to clans for protection in the absence of a government presence. Entire neighbourhoods of Mogadishu are still controlled by specific clans today, and Hawiye groups remain dominant.<sup>45</sup>

Fighting for control of strategic neighbourhoods has divided the city, and the shifting conflict has led to repeated displacement as people keep moving in search of relative safety.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, rival clans' territorial control has also restricted people's movement and confined humanitarian assistance programmes, hampering organisations' ability to reach those most vulnerable and in need.<sup>47</sup> Local markets and the flow of goods and services have been similarly affected.

The same clan power dynamics lie behind IDPs' lack of tenure security and the growing number of forced evictions. Competition for natural resources fuels fighting in rural areas, but land and property disputes are at the heart of the urban conflict.<sup>48</sup> Restitution has been a stumbling block in several failed attempts at peacebuilding, and in its absence the ongoing power struggles continue to cause conflict and displacement within the city.<sup>49</sup> Common housing, land and property (HLP) challenges include the unlawful appropriation and attribution of public land titles by government officials and private owners, inheritance disputes and claims over land and property by returning IDPs, refugees and migrants.<sup>50</sup>

The role of gatekeepers in this dynamic has protected IDPs in some cases, but pushed them into secondary displacement in others. In exchange for payment, they provide a plot of land on which IDPs can settle, basic services and security. They also grant humanitarian agencies access to deliver aid. There are thought to be more than 130 gatekeepers in Mogadishu.<sup>51</sup>

In the absence of government support, gatekeepers have acted as intermediaries between humanitarian NGOs and IDPs since the start of Somalia's conflict. They see themselves as service providers, but their actions are not free of controversy. They use both violent and non-violent means to consolidate their power and control over people, land and property, including the establishment of alliances with local militias, rent increases and the attachment of conditions to access and freedom of movement.<sup>52</sup>

Gatekeepers' actions have been defined as "opaque, and in some cases exploitive".<sup>53</sup> As clan members, they reflect the ethnic and power structures that have clearly shaped Mogadishu's unfolding urban political economy. The combination of harassment, gender based violence, insecurity and forced evictions is often associated with their control or lack of it, and they have significantly influenced displacement patterns in the city.

Humanitarians, researchers and policymakers have highlighted the importance of addressing HLP issues if conflict and displacement are to be reduced.<sup>54</sup> In its National Development Plan (2017-2019), the Somali government talks about the impact of IDPs on land ownership. The chapter on housing refers to their lack of adequate housing and the increasing risk of eviction and homelessness they face.<sup>55</sup>

Acceptance of HLP as a key developmental concern is a good step toward longer-term interventions to support IDPs' pursuit of durable solutions and reduce the risk of secondary displacement, but the challenges are far from being addressed. Legislation is outdated - the Urban Land Distribution Law dates back to 1973 - and while customary *xeer* systems and sharia or Islamic law have been successful in settling disputes, they have been detrimental to IDPs arriving in Mogadishu from other cities and rural areas.

Tenure problems are emerging more quickly than they can be resolved. An estimated 80 per cent of court cases heard in Mogadishu's supreme court are related to land.<sup>56</sup> Evictions are just one way in which people, particularly IDPs living in disadvantaged urban settlements, will continue to be dispossessed and displaced as disputes are resolved in favour of landowners.

## RURAL CONDITIONS

To fully understand the patterns and trends of urban displacement in Somalia, the factors that lead people to flee rural areas must also be considered. The sharp increase in new displacements in 2017 had much to do with dire conditions in the countryside. There were around 858,000 new rural displacements associated with drought, accounting for 4.6 per cent of displacement associated with disasters worldwide.<sup>57</sup>



*Fatumo Abdullahi, 35, and her family live in a settlement for displaced families in Mogadishu's Kaxda district. Fatumo and her family members were displaced from Bay region due to the drought. Photo: Christian Jepsen/NRC, March 2018*

The agriculture sector is Somalia's second largest source of economic activity. Around 23 per cent of the population are agropastoralists, and 60 per cent depend on livestock for their livelihoods.<sup>58</sup> This means that drought has had broad socio-economic impacts well beyond being a trigger for displacement.

Other countries in the Horn of Africa have also suffered drought, but its effects have been most acutely felt in Somalia. This due at least in part to the lack of basic services and underdevelopment in rural areas, which have also contributed greatly to the protracted and complex nature of the country's crisis. Despite the number of people involved in the agriculture sector, Somalia has a chronic crop deficit. Recent local production has only met 22 per cent of per capita cereal needs, and even in the best agricultural seasons the figure only reaches 40 to 50 per cent.<sup>59</sup>

Agriculture, fishery and transport infrastructure is extremely poor in southern Somalia. There have been almost no major repairs to flood barriers, irrigation systems or roads in the 27 years since the start of the conflict. Armed militias with little farming experience and skills have taken over irrigated land from local farmers and state-owned enterprises in prime agricultural areas such as Lower Shabelle, and used those whose land they have appropriated as underpaid labour.

Conflicts between the militias and military operations against them have damaged equipment and prevented infrastructure maintenance and repairs. Al Shabaab still controls vast areas of agriculture land in Lower Shabelle, and both militias and government forces operate checkpoints that make it difficult

for farmers to access markets. Poor security also hampers aid agencies' efforts to repair agricultural infrastructure.<sup>60</sup>

Rural households across Somalia earn income almost exclusively from petty agriculture, livestock rearing and day labour, and occasionally from remittances. There are no social safety nets to support those affected by drought.<sup>61</sup> The provision of basic services is also extremely poor. Only 21 per cent of households in rural areas have access to an improved source of water, compared with 70 per cent in urban areas. The figures for access to improved sanitation facilities are two and 13 per cent respectively.<sup>62</sup> Literacy and education levels are improving in urban areas, but stagnating or decreasing in rural areas.

IDMC estimates that sudden onset disasters are likely to displace an average of around 30,000 people in Somalia in any given year in the future, giving the country the highest disaster displacement risk in the Greater Horn of Africa region relative to its population size.<sup>63</sup> If this risk is to be reduced, it is clear that both the government and the international humanitarian and development sectors will have to make climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, contingency planning and rural and urban development high priorities.

The risk of displacement associated with conflict cannot be assessed in a probabilistic way, but it is clear that the link between conflict and drought aggravates rural poverty and vulnerability, which in turn keeps pushing people to move toward Somalia's urban areas.





Photo: NRC/Christian Jepsen, January 2012

## CONCLUSION

Climate impacts, particularly drought and floods, have shaped patterns of displacement toward urban areas over the last two years. Erratic rainfall and extended drought since 2015 and intensive flooding during the 2018 rainy season increased rural vulnerabilities. This not only triggered displacement, but also increased competition for natural resources, aggravating the conflict.

Beyond the drought that has affected the Horn of Africa more generally, the lack of service provision in rural areas has also driven people to move, and the prospect of humanitarian assistance in Mogadishu has been a key pull factor. This aspect needs further analysis, given its contribution to making displacement an increasingly urban phenomenon and exacerbating the impacts on both IDPs and urban systems.

Once in the city, IDPs face harsh and unstable conditions. The government does not have the capacity to absorb large influxes of rural IDPs, nor has it been able to reduce further displacement risks, including those associated with forced evictions and the impact of sudden-onset disasters such as floods. Humanitarian assistance is scattered and insufficient, and is regulated by unlawful intermediaries who obstruct providers' efforts to reach those most in need. The case of Mogadishu challenges the notion that cities provide IDPs with safety and security. There are more evictions than ever before, gender based violence and harassment is prevalent and health and education services lacking.

The informal nature of the housing sector is also a crosscutting challenge that puts a burden on both cities and IDPs.

Clan dynamics continue to influence the geography of urban displacement, and new investments have increased real estate prices and tensions over land and property rights. In the absence of clear laws to regulate transactions, the number of illegal evictions, the majority of them affecting IDPs, is likely to continue to rise. This neglected issue requires urgent attention if displacement is to be reduced and durable solutions facilitated for hundreds of thousands of IDPs.

In the meantime urban displacement is changing Mogadishu's demography and extending the city's limits via unregulated urban sprawl into areas that lack basic services. Further research is needed to examine how this unsustainable development will perpetuate Somalia's humanitarian crisis, and how spiralling displacement risk can be reined in.

The sharp increase in new displacements in Somalia is, in the broadest sense, down to a lack of opportunity and security. Displacement figures disaggregated by location and trigger help to understand patterns and trends, and to inform humanitarian programming. Such interventions are essential to protect and assist those most in need, but addressing the underlying drivers of displacement will require comprehensive policy responses and long-term development initiatives and investments.

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Cover photo: While these women were away from this resettlement camp, their shelters were destroyed. Now they have returned to gather up their belongings from the ruins. They are being evicted, as the landowner wants his land cleared to prepare for sale or commercial use in Mogadishu. Photo: NRC, December 2017

#### Authors

Ivana Hajžmanová  
Monitoring Expert  
ivana.hajzmanova@idmc.ch

Vicente Anzellini  
GRID Coordinator  
vicente.anzellini@idmc.ch

#### Additional thanks to:

Mateus Mendonça, Maria Teresa Miranda Espinosa, Schâdi Sémnani, Evelyne Aero-Magero

IDMC  
NRC, 3 rue de Varembe  
1202 Geneva, Switzerland  
www.internal-displacement.org  
+41 22 552 3600  
info@idmc.ch